

Press Statement

Annual General Meeting

The following press statement issued on 23 July 1990 the conclusion of its annual general meeting held in by the General Council of the Bar of South Africa at Port Elizabeth, is published for general information.

Statement of intent

At its 45th Annual General Meeting held in Port Elizabeth at the weekend, the General Council of the Bar of South Africa (GCB) unanimously adopted the following statement of intent:

- 1 The Bar identifies itself fully with the ideals, aspirations and challenges presented by a new democratic South Africa.
- 2 As a body of independent practitioners, the Bar is committed to providing specialised legal representation, at fair fees, to all persons who require such services.
- 3 By providing this representation, as well as facilities for the protection of human rights, access to justice for indigent persons and alternative dispute resolution, the Bar serves all the people of South Africa.
- 4 We shall continue to strive towards the attainment of justice for all according to the Rule of Law and to support reforms designed to achieve this goal.
- 5 The Bar is committed to:
 - the maintenance of an independent judiciary;
 - ensuring that the Bar is representative of all sections of the South African population;
 - providing greater access to justice by the expansion of legal services to all who require them

whilst maintaining the high standards, professional integrity and independence which are established hallmarks of the Bar.

The meeting was attended by delegates representing the Bar Councils of constituent Bars of the GCB, including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, Natal, Eastern Cape, OFS, North Cape, Transkei, Bophuthatswana and Ciskei.

Murder trials in Regional Courts

The GCB expresses its concern that accused persons who can now be tried for murder in the Regional Courts and sentenced to imprisonment for up to 10 years, may not be afforded legal representation, as the *pro Deo* system only operates in the Supreme Court. The GCB will seek an assurance from government that proper legal aid, or at least *pro Deo* defence, will be provided to such persons. The GCB further supports the proposal to introduce, as an urgent priority, a system of independent "public defenders" to provide legal representation to indigent accused persons in criminal cases in the lower Courts.

Poor persons

The GCB resolved to recommend to individual Bars that they create structures for advocates to volunteer a

certain amount of their time free of charge, to ensure that poor persons are not deprived of specialised legal representation in appropriate cases.

Combating delays

The GCB also considered methods of combating delays in civil litigation and will make various concrete proposals to the Minister of Justice and the Rules Board for reforms in this regard.

National Bar Conference

The GCB will hold its second National Bar Conference in Durban in July 1991 on the theme "The Future of the Legal System and the Legal Profession in a changing South Africa". The importance of maintaining close contact with the international legal profession was reaffirmed and the GCB, a Council member of the International Bar Association (IBA), will send delegates to the forthcoming biennial conference of the IBA in New York in September 1990.

Mr Milton Seligson SC of the Cape Bar was re-elected as chairman of the GCB and Mr William de Villiers SC of the Pretoria Bar, was elected vice-chairman. The Chief Justice, Mr MM Corbett, was again elected Honorary President of the organisation. ■